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## SOCIOLOGICAL CONSTRUCTION LINES. I<sup>1</sup>

### SECTION I. INTRODUCTORY

In several issues of a German chemical journal there appeared a curious advertisement. It stated that a certain name had been registered as a trademark, and offered a reward to the chemist who should produce a compound to fit the name. Somewhat similarly, the name "sociology" has taken a prominent place in the public mind, and has become the center of high hopes, before there is any clear and general agreement as to what sociology is or is to be. Even intelligent persons, who believe that the name contains a splendid prophecy, would be at a loss to assign to it a definite content, satisfactory to themselves or to other people of like intelligence and interest in the theme.

The word "sociology" is the name not so much of something that we already possess as of something to be striven for,<sup>2</sup> of a body of knowledge that we deeply need, that we have learned to want, and that we are beginning to accumulate. The spirit of sociology appears in a waking up to our ignorance of matters that are of the highest interest, as some items of knowledge suggest how much more we ought to know. The glimmering of light serves to make darkness visible. The problems to be studied are vast and intricate. No true spirit of sociology will pretend to their easy or quick solution. A new science is to be built up by

<sup>1</sup> This paper was read and discussed in my seminar in the spring of 1902. It contains, so far as I am aware, the first formulation of the theorem which I supported in a paper in this *Journal*, Vol. X, No. 3, "The Subject-Matter of Sociology." The manuscript of Professor Hayes's paper had never been in my hands until after the publication of mine. Meanwhile I had completely overlooked the fact that he had anticipated me in drawing a conclusion to which the logic of the situation has been pointing for a half-century. Upon reading the manuscript it was evident that an apology was due to the author, and this is the most adequate means of making the proper amends.—ALBION W. SMALL.

<sup>2</sup> Since this was written, in 1902, that which "we already possess" as sociology has increased in definiteness and richness, beyond the hopes of some of its disciples. Yet that "to be striven for" still forms the alluring horizon in every direction, and at many points presses close about us.

the patient toil of many, as cathedrals grew by the devotion of generations. The new age is not without its devotion. A science of sociology cannot be the discovery of a sudden inspiration: it is the supreme intellectual task of the twentieth century. This study is published, not as a dogmatic pronunciamento upon the points which it touches, but as a phase of thought which may prove to be one stage of progress.

It is not the popular mind alone that is in uncertainty as to what sociology is. Even to the scientist devoted to the subject the name stands for a problem rather than for an achieved solution. The problem is, moreover, so involved, and it presents so many phases and reduces itself into so many subsidiary problems, that each sociologist addresses himself to a different phase of the whole, a different set of subsidiary problems involved in the total solution; and, as a rule, each is inclined to describe the study of sociology as being just the particular kind of work in which he is absorbed. An extreme illustration of this is the remark of a German scholar, already famous for contributions to the subject which he has embodied in lectures and articles. This man, on being asked what he regarded as the most important books on sociology in the German language, answered: "There are no books in the German language on sociology as I conceive it." One who surveys the various and contrasting beginnings that have thus far been made is ready to appreciate the words with which Professor Fairbanks begins his *Introduction to Sociology*: "Sociology is the name applied to a rather inchoate mass of materials which embodies our knowledge about society." That this mass of materials includes much that is of great practical importance, and that in connection with it there have been developed already some broadening and illuminating points of view, is beyond question. But these points of view are not only independent, but largely isolated and unrelated, and these materials are presented in a multiplicity of unreconciled half-systems. The time for complete systematizing is not yet. Is it therefore necessary for the student to plunge at random into the tangle, and wander in confusion; or may he hope to form some approximation to a general concept of the field of sociology?

As school-children drawing maps, we were taught to use construction lines. A few salient points were located, and these were connected by lines which indicated vaguely the outline of the country to be studied. From these points the pencil began to trace the intricate windings of the shore, and with reference to these lines it located rivers, mountains, and cities. The student of sociology cannot yet lay down a chart of the continent he explores, but he may attempt to form some general conceptions, to discern and state some truths with far-reaching implications, that will serve, like construction lines, to facilitate his progress toward the more accurate tracing of the outlines of this realm, and the completer discovery of its particulars.

#### SECTION II. WHAT IS A SOCIETY?

What does the sociologist study? He studies societies, we are told. What, then, is a society?

The state is the most imposing of social organizations. Therefore it was naturally the first to receive scientific treatment. The two chief social sciences that preceded sociology had been developed from the point of view of interest in the state; they were political science and political economy. And the state has continued to be the most conspicuous society in the eyes of sociologists. Moreover, the idea of the state has grown concreter, richer, and more interesting by coming to include that which may be more accurately indicated by the word "nation." A "nation" is a people that is of one nativity, and that shares the other similarities of custom and culture which usually accompany unity of blood. During the period within which the notion of a science of sociology has been taking shape, the idea of a state, commonly held, has not been the idea of a massing of heterogeneous populations, forced by political power into a merely political unity. Instead, the state usually has been thought of as the political organization of a nation, together with only such others as have been "naturalized" by adoption into the national family or clan, so that the state is bound together, not alone by political authority, but also by sharing, if not literally in the national blood, yet in the national patriotism, ideals, customs, economic and cultural

life-current. Sociology was welcomed as the science of such complex unitary entities. Thus the history of sociology has been influenced by the fact that the idea of such a new science has taken shape during a period when thought about social facts has been intensely politico-nationalistic. Nationalism was winning, or had newly won, its triumphs, and it was assumed, almost as a matter of course, that social topics would be contemplated from a politico-nationalistic point of view. The idea that any social science is politico-national science had the field, and governed thought, as the idea that anything to travel in was a stage-coach once had the field, and governed the form of early railroad cars, and even yet appears in the compartments of European cars, and sometimes in moldings upon their exteriors that outline the form of a series of coach bodies.

Although it has been common to admit that the word "society" is also a name for other forms of human relationship, including the fortuitous concourse in a hotel lobby, or a culture group like Christendom, Jewry, or the Hellenes; and it even has been added that all humanity, save isolated groups that live in ignorance of the existence of any other portions of the race, constitutes a single society; yet these admissions have been little more than lip-service. These forms of society have been recognized with a nod and passed by, while the only society really accepted as fit to be the object of study for the sociologist has been the nation-state.

This view has not only occupied the popular mind. The scientists also clearly show that they feel the association in a railway coach or a hotel lobby to be far too temporary and trivial, and that of "humanity" too tremendous or too vague or too remote from interest to be the object of their study. Even a culture unit like Christendom is not the kind of a society that extensively engages their attention. A city comes nearer to being the real and interesting thing, inasmuch as it is more like a nation-state, being a political body, definitely limited and having a complex and inclusive common life. The conception of a society that enlisted them in the study of sociology, that dominates their thought and discussions, the society that they wish to study and aim to explain,

is suggested and typified by the nation-state. This has been regarded as the social group *par excellence*, and as being not only a *political* unit, but a distinct and unitary combination of the total tide of associated activity.

It is necessary for sociologists to form the habit of thinking that it is enough to constitute a society when people are united in any one of the significant forms of collective action. Besides political societies, there are economic societies, creedal societies, intellectual societies many and various, ethical societies each with a distinct conscience code of its own, and æsthetic societies each with its own conventionality, etc. But hitherto the habit has been to think that the most important and only adequate meaning attached to the term "a society" is that of a population unified by political, and usually by racial, ties, and also by its manifold non-political institutions and customs, and by constant communication and interaction, each modifying the whole and modified by the whole, while this highly integrated society is distinct from other societies and from the rest of the world.

This, of course, was the position of sociologists as long as they regarded society as a great organism, almost as if it were a higher type of animal. And it is by no means confined to such sociologists. It dominates the discussions of men who do not state it, and it is stated and advocated by men whose thought it no longer dominates. It should cause no wonder if the true and heuristic definition of society is reached only after society has been extensively studied. First discoveries must be made without the aid of construction lines which facilitate later exploration. And if, as in this case, a false idea is once formed, either of the shape of a new land, or of the object of study for a new science, the discoveries that will rectify it must be made in spite of the early misconception. In that case the notes of the explorer will contradict the map with which he set out, and such contradictions may accumulate before he modifies his map. And the true observations of the scientist may indicate the erroneousness of the academic definitions from which he starts for some time before he attends to the inconsistency and remedies it.

Thus even Professor Tarde was at pains to defend the notion

of societies that are unified, not only with reference to political or creedal or any other single kind of social activity, but with reference to all kinds at once. He writes:

The phrase "social groups" is a more comprehensive expression by which one means a community having the same type of civilization, which implies a combination of economic, legal, moral, religious, scientific, and political similarities.<sup>3</sup>

In an article entitled "*La réalité sociale*" he says that a society distinct from others, and unified with respect to the total tide of complex activities which the sociologist investigates, is a reality in a much completer sense than that in which the Nile or the Ganges is a reality.<sup>4</sup> He defends the statement thus:

The question is whether the social group forms a *true totality*<sup>5</sup> that is objective and not merely subjective. . . . Even *when not thought*, the chemical whole formed by the combination of several molecules, the astronomic whole formed by a solar system, the mechanical whole, etc., and *a fortiori* the organic whole, is something. Is the same true of the *social whole*? Yes.<sup>6</sup>

Special emphasis is laid upon the statement that society is unified not alone with respect to its subjective life. He says:

Societies (plural) are not merely masses of inter-spiritual action; they are at one and the same time masses of inter-spiritual and inter-corporeal actions, combined with many physical actions, united struggles with the forces of nature to repel and to utilize them.<sup>7</sup>

Professor Tarde went out of his own way to emphasize the material unity of the social group, thus comprehensively considered. His more characteristic emphasis is upon the spiritual individuality of societies, expressed by the phrases "*esprit sociale*" and "*moi social*"—phrases especially prominent in his *Logique sociale*. And in closing his article on "*La réalité sociale*" he says: "The social organism is only a metaphor, but the *social spirit* is a reality."<sup>8</sup> The assumption even of a spiritual life of the community that is unified and distinct *save in certain par-*

<sup>3</sup> *Les transformations du pouvoir*, p. 2.

<sup>4</sup> *Revue philosophique*, Vol. LII, pp. 458, 459.

<sup>5</sup> The italics in each instance are his.

<sup>6</sup> *Loc. cit.*, p. 459.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 450.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 476.

*ticular activities* is in no way essential to his contributions to sociology. Although in his theoretical discussion of the scope of sociology he insists on this conception, in his actual investigation he ignores it. And he more nearly describes his own object of study in the following, from the same article:

A sentiment, a principle, an intention, at first individual, spreads and becomes more and more general, and in becoming general consolidates, opposes itself to the individuality of each one of those associated; then, a subjective thing, it becomes by this opposition an objective thing, and takes on a *material* appearance, since it resists each one of us, though founded upon the mental habits of us all.<sup>9</sup>

Contrast this contention of Tarde with an assertion of Seignobos',<sup>10</sup> who has no concern about building up a science of sociology, and consequently no sensitiveness about social unity. He says that it is a matter of supreme difficulty to mark out a group having a distinct economic history of its own, because some processes of economic development will belong only to sections of the population to be studied, and others will be shared by people outside the group. If, then, as Seignobos declares, it is a matter of the greatest difficulty to distinguish a group that is the bearer of an economic evolution, how many times greater than the greatest is the difficulty of marking out a group that is the bearer of a complete social development?

Seignobos further remarks that the same man may be Luxemburger by nation, Frenchman by language, Roman Catholic by religion, and member of the German *Zollverein* economically. If these four trunk lines intersect in one man, how many lesser lines cross in him? As soon as one tries to mark off a society that is the bearer of *all* the social influences which mold a single life, he will find that this society will contain only the single individual, with fragments of countless others, and not the whole of any other life. Or, to put the same fact otherwise, each one of us belongs to many different groups of association, but to no society that is coextensive with them all. Our social relations shade

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 460.

<sup>10</sup> *La méthode historique appliquée aux sciences sociales*, pp. 216 ff. According to Seignobos, the social sciences are economics, demography, and the history of social doctrines.



away from us in all directions, and where they become faintest to us they are center points for new processes of radiation. No *comprehensive* society can be isolated from others except by a bleeding abstraction. The only distinct societies are distinguished by *particular activities*, not by the total complexus of social activity in which its members are engaged. A state is a *political* unit, but not a unit in the comprehensive sense imagined.

There is nothing in national lines to hem the social process as such. London, Berlin, and New York may be in the same market. A technical invention made in Paris is a social fact for the American electrician. A scientific discovery made in Jena is a social fact for the scholars of Christendom. The ethical, artistic, scientific, and fashion resemblances and interactions between the ethical, artistic, scientific, and fashionable élite of different nations may be greater, though oceans intervene, than between the people of different wards of the same metropolis. It *may be* that, as a rule, the total social impact of things American upon a Bostonian of Beacon Street is greater than the total social impact of things cosmopolitan; but even that would be a question of doubt. The man in Beacon Street may be the intellectual offspring of Schopenhauer, Darwin, and Spencer; æsthetically and ethically he may be most akin to Shakespeare, Milton, Wordsworth, Tennyson, Browning, and Goethe. If it be true that, as a rule, the American most affects and is most affected by things American, this difference in degree is no organic line of separation. There is no such difference in kind, no such essential distinction, as to justify a definition of the society in which he lives, including all that is American and excluding all that is cosmopolitan. And as to the mere matter of difference in degree, what is to be said of the comparative degree of social separation between the man of Beacon Street and the man of the wharves? Tarde avers that

In fact, the principal obstacle to free imitative radiation of inventions in our day is far less the frontier of states, formerly so high and so opaque, at present so transparent and low, than the partitions that separate different strata of the population, different classes, different parties, different religions, etc.<sup>11</sup>

Most of the groups that engage in more or less permanent activi-

<sup>11</sup> *Les transformations du pouvoir*, p. 185.

ties, like families, clubs, churches, or schools, are relatively only points, foci from which radiate in narrower or wider circles activities that are finally merged and lost to view in the total current of associative activity. Cities are vortices made up of great numbers of such smaller whirls. Most of the facts that the sociologist needs to study are limited and local, and belong to classes of facts that are international. Social interactions disregard national boundaries in every way. Some overleap national boundaries, but not class lines within the nation, and are international without including the whole of any nation; others are confined within a single group within a single nation. The social units they create are international, infra-national, and in every way non-national.

A "social whole," a "true totality," as defended by Professor Tarde, unified and distinct with reference to the whole complex of social activities, is a fancy; it does not exist. There is nowhere in the world a society unified within and distinct without in the sense that has been commonly understood in the definition, "Sociology is the science or study of society." This assertion need cause no dismay. It is by no means removing the sociologist's right to exist, but is a step toward making that right evident.

The protest here entered is not against the study by sociologists of national societies, but it is against holding a concept of a society which appropriates the name to great and imposing unions of whole populations and which imagines that groups are united in their multiplex social life as a whole, instead of seeing that the larger the group, the more likely is their bond of actual union and criterion of differentiation from all other peoples to be comparatively simple, if not tenuous. If it is correct to think that people become a society, not by being united in *all* the prominent forms of their associative activity, but whenever they are united in any *one* of them, then surely they are a society when united in so important a form of association as the political activities, and the state is of course one form of a society. The study of what is national is an immensely important subdivision of sociology, though very far from being the whole of it. The study of extensive and permanent groups, whole populations, is important because it reveals the *radiating power* of social influences, which

tend, after sufficient time, to cause the assimilation of a large percentage of those within their range, so that among people who are in free communication with each other prominent forms and effects of social activity become prevalent, and are spoken of as "national traits;" though the phrase properly means only that these are rather more prevalent among a given population than elsewhere, and not by any means that they are peculiar to the nation described, nor universal among its people. Not one of these so-called national traits is likely to be universal among the population, and it may be that no single individual exhibits them all. Moreover, the phrase should not be understood to mean that the social radiation to which the prevalence of such traits is due is hemmed in by national boundaries, nor necessarily that it originated within them. The study of great groups, like the nation, helps, moreover, to a comprehension of the *interaction* of different social processes. The study of smaller societies may not so illuminate the fact that the activity which they have in common is affected and determined by many other activities which they do not have in common. A study of political activity may sooner lead to the perception that particular group activities are determined by many other activities. For it is clear that political activities are affected by activities of many other kinds. The interdependence of different forms of social activity has been observed by the keenest students of each politico-national science. And illustration of such interdependence was the essential service of the biological analogy. But it is erroneous to jump to the conclusion that because political activities are truly national, therefore all the other activities that affect or are affected by the political are parts of a national unity. Political activities themselves constitute a true unity which is affected by other activities, which are international, sectional, personal, and in every possible way uncoextensive with the nation or state and in contrast with its unity. It may be possible to think of any unity as *including* all that is related to it. But where will you draw a line around such a unity? It may be possible to think of the unity of a national society as built up out of the heterogeneous activities of portions of the population—activities which they do not share

with the rest of the population, but do share with members of other populations. But this is confusion of thought. It not only ignores differences, but also obscures the true social unities which are constituted by particular forms of social activity.

The prevalent notion of a society has, perhaps, truth enough for some uses, but by no means accuracy enough to serve in defining the object of study for a science. It is the natural result of a rough and unprecise observation of resemblances, differences, and interrelationships. It is a common-sense view, in the sense in which that phrase is used when it is said that the business of science is to test and correct common-sense views. In doing so, science quite commonly supplants them, and shows that the earth is not flat nor fixed, and that the sun does not rise nor set. The notion of a complex, integrated society is true in so far as it roughly recognizes some truths, and untrue in that it recognizes them only roughly, adds unwarranted assumptions, and ignores subtler realities. We are familiar with the air before we think of the ether. We are impressed by great "national" movements and their conspicuous consequences before we attend to the subtle medium of social activities in which we are immersed, which enter the molecular recesses of our psychic life, and whose pervasive efficiency is the main element in social causation.

The word "society," far from denoting so stupendous, definite, integrated, and organic a unity, as many sociologists have supposed, is a name for any group of people who are together. Togetherness, *interrelation*, is the essential of society. If all mankind are related by mutual causation, then with reference to this interrelation there is one all-inclusive society. If at the same time the members of a given group are related to each other in a way peculiar to themselves, then by virtue of that relationship they are a *particular* society. There are as many societies as there are related groups. These societies may overlap to any extent. A single individual may be related in one way to one group, for instance, by sharing a common religious creed; and in another way to another group, for instance by entering with them into a political organization; and similarly he may belong at the same time to many different societies. Each of us may have been a

member of thousands of societies, some of them too temporary and trivial to deserve the name in any very serious sense. Each of us probably has been a member of hundreds of societies, each of which has left some permanent effect upon his life and character. Herein lies the explanation of the variety of individualities in so far as that is a social product.

People may be united by relations of time, space, similarity, and causation. Similarity of persons, as persons, is similarity in experience, and experience is conscious activity. Relations of similarity and causation are more important than those of space and time alone. If people are together in time and space, yet without relations of similar experience or of causation, as may be the case with a group in a railway car, then they do not constitute a society in any important sense. If they are united in experiences, or activities that are temporary, trivial, and without causal importance, then they are a society in a thin and attenuated sense of that word. There are degrees of association, and therefore there are societies of many degrees. A society is important in proportion to the number of persons united, the duration of their union, the character of the similar experiences or activities which unite them, and the causal effectiveness of their union. A society in the fullest sense of the word is united by all four of the mentioned forms of relationship. Its members are together in time and space, but more especially they are together in similarity of human activities, affected by similar causes, affecting each other, and aware of their union. This is submitted as an answer to the question, "What is a Society?"

Since the above was written, there has appeared in the *American Journal of Sociology* an article by Professor Romanzo Adams,<sup>12</sup> in which he says, in effect, that it is impossible to prove that society has any sort whatever of objective unity, but that the sociologist is at liberty to think of society as a unity without regard to whether it is an objective unity or not; that the question of unity is a matter of method of thought. The statement and argument are astute and ingenious, but an erroneous hypothesis may be quite as ingenious as a true one.

<sup>12</sup> "The Nature of Social Unity," *American Journal of Sociology*, September, 1904, p. 208.

Is it not preferable to deny that it is fundamentally important for sociologists *even to think* of society as having the highly complex unity which it does not objectively possess, and to discover a form of social unity which is an objective reality? Without misapprehending the idealistic argument, it is possible to insist that it is important that the scientist should think of the object of his science as it is.

It is true, not to say a truism, that "we are not concerned with anything outside the world of experience,"<sup>18</sup> in the sense that we can think only our own thoughts and be conscious of only our own states of consciousness. Nevertheless, the objective idealist, without disloyalty to his metaphysics, may hold that it is of the greatest concern to us whether our thoughts correspond to things as they exist "independent of *our* experience;" and Professor Adams appears to be an objective idealist and not a subjective idealist; that is, he seems to recognize that there are "things in themselves independent of *our* experience." And I suppose that the apparatus of intelligence exists by reason of a long contact with things as they are, and that its biological teleology is to set up subjective conscious states that correspond so well with "things themselves" that they will stimulate actions that fit the external realities; for example, so that we shall not run against ledges, leap over precipices, or try to walk up trees; or so that all the engineers on a railroad, in presence of a given semaphore signal, which exists out there independent of their subjectivity, shall think "open switch." And this correspondence between subjective experience and objective reality is quite as important for science, as science, as it is for practice; indeed, it may be said to be the only important consideration for science. Even abstraction, which thinks things apart which do not exist apart, is scientifically useful only when it thinks the objective truth about its fragment, and is scientifically dangerous in proportion as it forgets the objective relations of its fragment, or ceases thinking before it has thought the fragments together again as they really exist.

It is perfectly true, as Professor Adams says, that we may

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 211.

select certain bricks in a wall and think of them as a unity; but our thought, if it is anything intelligible, is a thought of the bricks as existing in certain relations, in which they really do exist. We may think of them as in certain special relations to each other, other bricks in the wall not being in the same relations to these particular bricks; or we may even think of them merely as the bricks we are thinking of. In the latter case we are thinking of them as in a certain relation to the thinker, the objects of his selection. Professor Adams's contention seems to be that the sociologist selects certain phenomena to think about and calls them a society, by reason of the fact that he has decided to think of them together, and that this is all "the social unity" is. If I understand him correctly, he falls into the same error as those who say that space and time are *only* forms of thought. They are names for real relations between things. And relations are as real as things. Things are not only thought of as in relations, they *exist* in relations to each other. Things that really exist together in a particular relation to each other thereby constitute a unity, whether anybody perceives it or not. Not all relations are worth noticing. Others are among the most important of realities.

The writer of the article referred to also says that "the social process in its unity is not psychic,"<sup>14</sup> and that to hold that it is psychic is to imply the existence of a "transcendental somewhat," an "over-soul," that can think the social thoughts and will the social deeds. This is just as true as it would be to say that a company of marching soldiers cannot be regarded as a physical unity without implying a colossal pair of legs to do the marching. The unity in each case is a unity of relations, a unity of similarity in activities, whether physical or psychic. The unity of the marching company is real and does not depend on being thought by the man on the curbstone. And social unities, constituted by related psychic activities, are likewise real and not dependent on the subjectivity that conceives the unity.

After all, the formal concept "society" is not the most fundamental one for sociology. The statement, "Sociology is the study

<sup>14</sup> *Loc. cit.*, p. 223.

of society," even when accompanied by a truthful definition of society, does not necessarily constitute an adequate definition of sociology. The formal definition of society cannot be filled out with its content, nor the conception of sociology receive its significance, until an answer has been given to the question, What are social phenomena? What are the phenomena of which it is true that similarity with respect to these indicates social unity of a kind far more significant than mere relation in space and time, the phenomena that constitute social character in the most important sense, and which are conditioned by social causes? The answer to this query is the supreme element in a true and adequate conception of sociology.

### SECTION III. TWO ANSWERS TO THE QUESTION, WHAT ARE THE SOCIAL PHENOMENA?

The aim of the last section was not only to answer the question, What is a Society? but also, by a process of elimination, to draw one step nearer to an answer to the question, What are the characteristic objects of attention for a science of sociology? It was attempted to remove from the list of tentative answers to that question, the imposing but semi-imaginary notion of the great, distinct society of highly complex integration. The definition of society which was substituted for it, however true and important, is not an adequate answer to the query, What are the social phenomena?

Next after the nation-state society, either other "organizations" and "groups" or else "institutions" have claimed the attention of sociologists, because they are relatively conspicuous, permanent, static, and also because they are recognized as means to social ends; and means are nearer than ends and wont to press closer upon the attention and get themselves treated as the be-all and end-all of the process in which they play a part.

Organizations do not furnish the object-matter for a new general science of "sociology." They are studied by the already existing special social sciences. Legal, political, economic, religious, and domestic organizations have not escaped painstaking investigation, and if any forms of organization have escaped such



investigation, they are relatively unimportant. And while it is not inconceivable that there might be a study of organizations as such, which should investigate characteristics of organizations which are not peculiar to those studied by any one social science, but which belong to all organizations, yet such a study of organizations as forms of association does not promise to reveal their real significance, which is to be discovered only by studying the various forms of activity for the sake of which they exist. Moreover, literary, religious, and other cultural activities, and social activities as a whole, are not embodied in organizations. In so far as they are organized at all, that fact is only an incident and not the essence, and the great mass of social interaction is not organized. The social activities that mold every man, as well as every group and organization, must escape the sociologist whose attention is riveted upon organizations. And, if it can be made to appear that a general science of sociology can grasp this far richer field, no one will be likely to content himself with the conception of sociology as a study of organizations. Likewise, if it be said that sociology should be a study of groups, which, whether organized or not, are at least united by political, creedal, or some other form of related activities, the same is to be said as has just been said concerning organizations, namely, that the imposing and important groups are already studied, as groups, by the special social sciences. And those which are neither important nor imposing *as groups* do carry on *activities* that are important and that should not escape the attention of the sociologist.

Similarly, of institutions it is to be said that they receive attention from the existing special social sciences, and that a new general science of sociology should not set out either to make itself a hodge-podge of the study of institutions that are already receiving detailed, special treatment, or to devote itself to the least important and hitherto most neglected institutions. And whatever general truths there are concerning organizations, groups, or institutions — truths which may not be discovered by any special social science, and, when once discovered, may pertain to them all — they are to be sought, not by merely studying organizations as organizations, nor institutions as institutions, but by studying the activities of human association, of which institutions and

organizations are not the essence, but more or less incidental products and deposits, and which transcend the limits of group or institutional forms. This is not excluding the sociologist from the study of any of the products of association, but only asserting that the range of his attention cannot be defined in these terms. The truth of this assertion perhaps can be made evident only by disclosing some more satisfactory view of the sociologist's field of study.

A kind of social interaction that is of universal human significance may appear in transient relations, now of a few individuals here, now of a few individuals there. These interactions, like all association, involve a certain degree of togetherness, and for controversial purposes might be called, in a sense, group-phenomena. It makes little difference what they are called after they are recognized and understood. But to start out in search of group-phenomena is a good way to prevent adequate recognition or comprehension of them. Possibly a student of groups, as such, might recognize that an essential object of sociological study often may be present where two workmen sit on a doorstep smoking their evening pipe. But there is danger that he would think such fleeting phenomena negligible, and scorn the idea that they could be subjected to scientific study. Yet the kinds of interaction that go on in such transient meetings of twos and threes are of vast significance, and by no means to be omitted from any adequate account of the social process. The impossibility of enumerating such meetings is no more a rational ground for disregarding them than the impossibility of taking a census of microbes is a reason why the pathologist should cease to study microscopic life.

A kind of action that occurred but once, an experience or trait peculiar to a single individual, might be neglected. But a kind of experience that pertains to millions cannot be neglected by sociologists, even though it recurs in the transient meetings of twos and threes, and the millions by whom it is repeated never form a group. Transitions start from such microscopic phenomena, and when they become group-phenomena the transition is already accomplished. It is more important for the sociologist to distinguish kinds of activity that pass between man and man, than to distinguish established groups. And actions repeated

millions of times, here and there, now and then, are often of far greater social importance than the decrees of parliaments. There is another particular in which sociology, as a mere study of groups or institutions, is blindfolded to objects indispensable to its investigation. Sociology must take note, not only of temporary contacts between scattered individuals, but also of forms of association that overleap intervals of space and time. These are of such significance, both in quality and in quantity, that some of them must force themselves even upon the student of groups. And he may conceivably make a definition of the word "group" or the word "institution," from which none of these which he has taken into account would necessarily be excluded, however unlikely it is that he would get them all properly into his perspective. His habitual concept of a group may be such as not to sunder from his society the Frenchman at the antipodes of France, who, as Tarde says, is a Frenchman still. The student of groups and institutions may possibly give adequate account of the part played by literature in molding men and societies. He may recognize every author and every book and every journal as the creator of society. If so, then Robinson Crusoe, on his desert island, was in a group, if he had a Bible or a copy of Homer from that bounteous ship's store; and if by reading he warmed a little his desolate heart with thoughts which he shared with the wise and goodly company in all Christendom and in all ages who have been quickened by the words he read, then lonesome Crusoe was in a society of letters with all of those living afar and long dead. The kind of interactions which it seems so difficult, if not absurd, to think of as group-phenomena are of the greatest significance to sociology; and, moreover, they become manageable and fruitful objects of study as soon as the sociologist's task and theme are adequately conceived. The part they play in making individual and social life what life is, none can doubt, though none as yet can fully comprehend it. There is a tide of human action and influence which beats about every individual of the race and evokes from each his self-realizing response.

One of the greatest hindrances to the progress of this new science has been the difficulty of stating sociological problems. We have been possessed of a general wish to understand society,

but have lacked definite questions to ask our sphinx—specific questions, the answers to which would contribute toward the solution of the general problem. Sociologists have been like a party of men in the night, groping in the dark about the walls of a mansion which they desire to enter, but unable to find its doors and windows, getting vague notions of its mass and outline, but unable to enter and take possession of its apartments. Definite problems are the doors and windows, and even while unsolved they are full of promise, as barred doors give more hope of entrance than blank walls. Adoption of the view here presented surrounds us with many manageable problems. As soon as we realize that it is our task to discover the ways in which men affect each other, so that men become what they are, we realize that the unfolding of every human personality is a subdivision of our theme. To understand the social molding of one common life from the cradle to the grave would be one of the greatest possible contributions to sociology. According to this view, every human act, every human experience, has a natural history, and has its roots in the interplay with other lives. Not only is the development of an individuality a sociological problem, but it ramifies into many sociological problems. A trivial act may be as well worth studying as a revolution. Here lies one broad distinction between the principle of dramatic interest which guides the historian in the selection of his facts, and that which guides the selection of the sociologist. For the sociologist does not study any fact in order to understand that fact, but in order to understand the process from which such a fact arises, from which such facts have arisen in the past, and from which such facts will arise in the future. To this end the facts that are of themselves most insignificant may best repay investigation. The spoonful of water which the chemist gets by the union of hydrogen and oxygen is of no value, but to understand the composition of that spoonful of water is to understand the composition of the water of the five oceans. It is said that in all June no two leaves are quite alike; certainly no two human experiences are. This does not dismay the botanist, and should not the sociologist. Every human experience arises after a manner akin to the rise of countless other human experiences. It is the methods of the

genesis of human experience from human interaction that we seek to learn.

Yet although each experience, when understood, presumably illustrates the method of innumerable experiences, some will attract the sociologist far more than others, because they obviously represent some specially important species of experiences, or illustrate the origin of traits that characterize a class or a population. These may not always be better guides to interpretation of the methods of association than acts which seem more individual and isolated. But their prevalence is itself a problem to be explained. One class of experiences that will especially draw the attention of sociologists are those which it is particularly important to control. For example, those related to crime, vice, pauperism, and education. The kinds of investigation which the most intelligent exhibition of the practical spirit require can be adopted as parts of the theoretical quest.

This section has carried the process of elimination farther and has begun the positive statement of the object of the sociologist's attention, which will be made more definite in the section to follow. The characteristic objects of attention for sociology are neither complex societies, organizations, groups, nor institutions, nor any other of the great, imposing, and established, but relatively stark and static, deposits of social activity. It is necessary to conceive the object of sociological study in such a way as to fix attention upon the comparatively minute and fluctuating phenomena that teem with causal efficiency. It is also exceedingly desirable to attain a few dominant concepts that will serve as the biologist is served by the differential stain, which picks out and colors each nerve fiber, too minute to be separated by the dissecting knife; great truths into which we can immerse our confused social observations, and have the parts that are essentially related, however scattered and minute, take on a color of their own, and stand out to view till we see them in their systematic unities; and not that alone, but also see them pulsating with life.

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[*To be continued*]